

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

EA Number: AZ-410-2005-0011
Case File No.: Bonita Creek Allotment #4615
Applicant: Jeff Menges
BLM Office: Safford Field Office
Project: West Bonita Divider Fence # 5639
Location of Proposed Action: T6S R28E Sec. 6 NW ¼ S ½
EA Team Leader: Michelle Cox

Conformance with Applicable Land Use Plan

This proposed action is subject to the following land use plan:

Name of Plan:

Safford District Resource Management Plan (RMP)

Date Approved:

Safford District RMP Approved Record of Decision (ROD) Part I 9/1992, and Part II 7/1994

This proposed action has been reviewed to determine if it conforms with applicable land use plan as required by 43 CFR 1610.5. The Safford Field Office RMP incorporated the Upper Gila/San Simon Grazing ES, 9/1978. The following applies:

GM01 - The Upper Gila-San Simon Grazing Environmental Impact Statement was completed in 1978 and its decisions have been implemented since then. Monitoring studies are in place and analysis indicates that rangeland condition is improving under the present management. Present management has the flexibility to modify grazing levels and seasons where necessary. In addition, the Eastern Arizona Grazing Environmental Impact Statement was completed in 1987 and the decisions made in that document are beginning to be implemented. The grazing decisions are incorporated by reference. RMP page 12 (ROD page 1).

This proposed action is in conformance with the applicable land use plan:

CHECK ONE

(x) Yes

() No

Purpose/Need for Proposed Action

The primary purpose of the fence construction is to divide the Spring Canyon Pasture

and allow seasonal pasture rest. The fence will also improve distribution and control of the cattle along West Bonita Rim Road. It will also improve visitor safety by reducing vehicle and cattle conflicts (accidents, harassment, etc.).

Description of Proposed Action and Alternatives

Proposed Action: The permittee will construct approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ mile of fence at T.6S R.28E Sec. 6 NW $\frac{1}{4}$ (See attached map for complete details). Construction, maintenance, and associated costs of this fence would be the responsibility of the permittee. No new roads would be constructed; however, it may be necessary to clear a creosote brush in the path of the fence line. The brush will be cleared by hand only, and only an amount necessary for the fence construction. Maintenance may be by foot, horseback, or 4 wheeler. The fence would be a four-strand, combination smooth and barbed wire fence built to BLM standards as shown in Attachment A. A cattle guard would be installed where the fence intersects with the West Bonita Rim Road.

Alternative A, No Action: The fence line would not be constructed and the cattle distribution not improved. Visitor/cattle interactions would not decrease.

Environmental Impacts

Scoping/Screening Session: Date: An internal scoping/screening was completed on December 15, 2004.

Issues Identified in Scoping:

1. A cultural resource survey would have to be completed.
2. Potential socio-economic impacts.

<u>Critical Element:</u>	<u>Affected</u>		<u>Critical Element:</u>	<u>Affected</u>	
	Yes	No		Yes	No
	(check)			(check)	
Air Quality	—	<u>X</u>	T&E An. Species	—	<u>X</u>
ACECs	—	<u>X</u>	T&E Plant Species	—	<u>X</u>
Cultural Resources	—	<u>X</u>	VRM	—	<u>X</u>
Flood Plains	—	<u>X</u>	Water Quality	—	<u>X</u>
Hazardous Materials	—	<u>X</u>	Wetlands/Riparian	—	<u>X</u>
Nat. Amer. Rel.	—	<u>X</u>	Wild & Scenic River	—	<u>X</u>
Prime/Unique farmland	—	<u>X</u>	Wilderness	—	<u>X</u>
Solid Waste	—	<u>X</u>	Noxious/Invasive	—	<u>X</u>
Environ. Justice	—	<u>X</u>	plants		
Other					

Description of Impacts

Proposed Action: Construction of this fence line would be limited to the removal of a creosote brush in the path of the fence line. Creosote is an invader species and would reinhabit the site following removal. Cacti will be avoided and, if necessary, salvaged and transplanted to an adjacent area. Intact removed creosote will be replanted as vertical mulch which will act as a microsite and will promote herbaceous plant re-establishment. A 3,960 ft by 5 ft belt will be disturbed. The equipment staging area would be an existing dirt parking area near the project.

Beneficial impacts include:

1. The fence allows better control of cattle through improved distribution. Grazing intensity would be more easily managed. Perennial grass cover would increase with improved cattle distribution.
2. Improved control of cattle reduce human and cattle interactions. Incidents, such as, vehicle accidents, cattle blocking the road, and harassment of cattle would be reduced.

Answers regarding the issues raised during scoping:

1. Cultural survey was completed on 12/15/2004. No effect found, and standard stipulations attached.
2. Improved control of livestock will decrease negative visitor/cattle interactions.

Alternative A, No Action: Cattle would continue to concentrate along West Bonita Rim Road and use it as a corridor. Incidents, such as, vehicle accidents, cattle blocking the road, and harassment of cattle would continue.

Cumulative Impacts

Proposed Action: The disturbances from the fence construction would be mitigated by salvaging cacti, reusing creosote as vertical mulch, and avoiding vegetation. If necessary, tire tracks would be raked out. The safety benefits of controlling livestock outweigh these disturbances. There are no other planned range improvements over the next 5 that would result in cumulative impacts. This project does contribute to cumulative impacts from range improvements completed over the past 5 years. A pending proposal to move the water troughs along West Bonita Rim Road will also decrease the presence of cattle on the road and improve cattle distribution.

Alternative A: Cattle would continue to concentrate along West Bonita Rim Road and use it as a corridor. Visitors would continue to share the road with cattle. Perennial grass cover would not improve.

Mitigating Measures and Residual Impacts

Mitigating Measures:

Cultural: No significant cultural resources will be impacted as a result of the proposed action. Standard stipulations will be included.

Vegetation: Creosote removed will be used as vertical mulch. Cacti salvaged will be transplanted to an adjacent area.

Persons/Agencies Consulted

Permitte: Jeff Menges

Dan McGrew, Safford Field Office Archeologist

Delbert Molitor, Safford Field Office Hydrologist

Marlo Draper, Safford Field Office Planning and Environmental Coordinator

Tom Schnell, Safford Field Office Natural Resource Specialist

Doug Powers, Safford Field Office Biologist

Michelle Cox, Safford Field Office Weed Coordinator and Rangeland Management Specialist

Ted McRae, Safford Field Office Riparian Specialist,

Philip Cooley, Safford Field Office Rangeland Management Specialist Team Lead

Preparer(s): Michelle Cox

Date:

2/9/2005

Attachments:

1. Cultural Survey, map of project, Standard cultural stipulations
2. Fence construction stipulations.
3. Standard noxious weed stipulations.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT/DECISION RECORD

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Decision Record:

It is my decision to implement the proposed action for the construction of the West Bonita Divider Fence in T.6S, R.28E, Sec. 6 NW ¼, Gila and Salt River Meridian. Given the impacts identified in the environmental assessment (AZ-410-2005-0011) and the mitigation measures identified for cultural, wildlife, and plant resources will be implemented. The other resources either had no effect, requiring no mitigation, or minimal effect and required no mitigation. The no action alternative was not selected, as it does not adequately meet the applicant's needs, nor is it adequate given the environmental, or economic impacts that are identified.

The rationale for this decision is such that it does not conflict with the Safford District Resource Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement. The issues that are identified are not significant and are mitigated sufficiently given the potential impact.

Finding of No Significant Impact:

I have reviewed environmental assessment AZ-410-2005-0011, including the explanation and resolution of any potentially significant impacts. I have determined that the proposed action with the mitigation described below will not have any significant impacts on the human environment and that an EIS is not required. I have determined that the proposed project is in conformance with the approved land use plan. It is my decision to implement the project with the mitigation measures identified below.

Mitigation Measures/Remarks:

Cultural: No significant cultural resources will be impacted as a result of the proposed action. Standard stipulations will be included and adhered to.
Wildlife: Standard specifications for fencing will be included and adhered to.
Plants: Exotic plant stipulations will be adhered to. Cacti will be avoided and, when necessary, transplanted to an adjacent site. Other intact vegetation will be used as vertical mulch.

<u>/s/ Tom Schnell</u>	<u>2/18/05</u>
Tom Schnell	Date
Assistant Field Office Manager for	
Resource Use and Protection	
Authorized Official	